

Movement of Secondhand Tobacco Smoke in Rental Housing

March 25, 2003

Renters make up 35.5% of Kitsap and Pierce County households and can be exposed to secondhand smoke (SHS) entering their homes from other apartments, from common areas, hallways, balconies or patios. During January of 2003, more than 1,000 renters in Pierce and Kitsap Counties were surveyed as part of a project looking at the impacts of secondhand tobacco smoke on tenants in multifamily housing. The goal was to determine the number of renters exposed to secondhand smoke from outside their residences. The Washington State Department of Health's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program provided funding.

Key findings:

- ⊘ **Rental housing is not isolating residents from the smell of contaminants generated outside of their own homes. Almost half (42%) of respondents report that the smell of SHS gets into their rental residence from somewhere else in or around the building.**
- ⊘ **Seventy-two percent of residents who encounter the movement of SHS into their homes say that it bothers them and 7% report that they are so bothered that they are thinking about moving.**
- ⊘ **More than one-third of the respondents have a chronic illness that makes them particularly vulnerable to secondhand smoke. In addition, about one-fifth of the respondents live with someone else who has a chronic illness.**
- ⊘ **Young children, the elderly, and people with chronic illnesses are at particular risk because of the negative impacts on immature or compromised lungs. Almost half of the households with these “vulnerable populations” experience movement of secondhand tobacco smoke at home.**
- ⊘ **Minorities, low-income housing tenants and young children are more likely to suffer. Multifamily rental residents who live in low-income housing, people of color, or children under the age of five are more likely to encounter the seepage of SHS into their homes.**
- ⊘ **Most tenants want to breathe clean air in their homes. Two-thirds of multifamily rental residents are interested in living in smoke-free housing.**
- ⊘ **A demand for smoke-free housing exists in the community. More than three-quarters say they are likely to choose a non-smoking building over a similar building that allows smoking. Almost half of renters would pay more rent to live where smoking was not allowed.**

Secondhand tobacco smoke seeping into residences from neighboring units poses both a health risk and a significant nuisance, yet it remains a common occurrence. Health jurisdictions, landlords, and tenants should work together to encourage designation of smoke-free buildings for the health of their residents. Our goal is to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke among children and adults in Kitsap and Pierce Counties.

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